

BRUSHWORK.

I think, to begin with, I had better clear the air by saying I cannot myself do brushwork. All the illustrations I have to shew you are not my own work, but that of children who are pupils of Mr. Cooke. The only excuse I have for speaking on the subject is interest in it, and the opportunities I have had, through being present at many of Mr. Cooke's classes, of seeing the work and watching his methods. Some time ago I asked Mr. Cooke if I might send a slight sketch of his lesson each week to some of the country students, who might be glad of hints and new ideas, but he refused so decidedly that I had to give it up. He was afraid that the work would be misrepresented, and that the spirit of it would be lost through transmission. However, I may at least tell you how I think *his* work may help us in *ours*.

He divides his year into three terms, each of which has its special subject. From January to March the children work at designs, practising in this way all thin, beautiful, brushwork strokes; then for the next few months Nature work is the order of the day; and at last in the autumn term comes what I think is almost the most interesting and important part of the work—illustration, but the success of this depends on the work that has been done in the early part of the year.

Let us take design first. Mr. Cooke takes the ellipse as a ground form, because so many of the objects of Nature—leaves, petals of flowers, and many animals have this underlying form or modification of it. He practices the children much at drawing this form. With chalk on the blackboard, or charcoal on big sheets of paper, he lets them practise the free, swinging stroke needed for a perfect ellipse. Never letting them rest their hands on the board or sheet of paper to prevent the work becoming stiff and the exercise losing its object. I quote from a paper of his on Brushwork. He says:—"The child soon strikes an ellipse or oval from its shoulder, and runs quickly over and over it to improve it. Some children will be reckless, some too cautious, some too quick, others too slow; we count time,

therefore, and regulate the speed. When we have found the right shape we try to keep it, or as we go round we try to find the middle way amongst all the wayward wanderings of the hand. To get more complete control, we try every time we go round to pass without faltering or hesitation through given points at each end, even if we trespass in other places. In this way the form will improve, the hand will become steadier, more under the control of will and imagination. The power of doing better grows by use." I think the reason we grown-ups cannot compete with the children in Brushwork is because we have begun too late. We cannot now get that sureness and steadiness of hand that they get so easily by beginning at the right time for this or any other manual work, which time is now acknowledged to be between the ages of seven and fourteen.

In these ellipses, which are arranged in some symmetrical order, the children place easily-made strokes or shapes and blobs in whatever pattern they please. In the brushwork paper before alluded to, Mr. Cooke says:—"Rules for design had better not be given;" but I think in our own teaching we shall find that the children who have worked through Froebel's gifts and some of his inventive occupations, will not go far wrong, as they understand instinctively the laws of contrast and reconciliation. I cannot too strongly emphasize the difference that this Froebel training makes in the children's understanding and grasp of things, and we cannot expect the same results from a child who, from four to seven years of age, has not had the advantage of this training. A certain amount of book knowledge has probably been pushed into him, but his powers of observation are undeveloped, and the spirit which grasps the hidden meaning and beauty of things is unawake. But when we come to teach the child who has had the advantages of the "New Education," we find that he responds to us—we speak in a tongue he understands, and our results from him are very different. Miss Hurwart, in a paper on the teaching of children after the Kindergarten age, says:—"What may we not expect of eyes that have learnt to distinguish the colours of balls, paper, and wool; that have learned to appreciate beauty and symmetry in form; the distance of objects by inches and feet; eyes that have conveyed accurate number of pictures to the mind, and which now reflect the light

within." Another help to design that Mr. Cooke mentions in his brushwork paper is this: the teacher gives his own pattern as copies, which are drawn with the class; these each child will modify, making others with the same grounds and elements.

Here, again, I think we must be guided by the previous education of the child: the New Education child does not need your pattern to copy and then modify; he has his own very decided ideas for his design, often far better than yours, and it would only worry and confuse him to have to use a thought that was not his own. But with the other child we have to watch against depressing him with the sense of his shortcomings, and disheartening him by failure, and for a time it may be well to give some crutches till he feels able to walk alone.

As to the Nature work, we have done so much ourselves that I need not enter much into details of the way Mr. Cooke teaches it. I think it is the easiest form of brushwork, because it is simply a question of correct copying, and requires no imagination. The child has the flower or twig before him, and if the habit of observing is his, and his hand is firm and practised, the result will be more or less successful. Mr. Cooke thinks far more of the twig painted, if it is characteristic in form, than if it is ever so beautifully painted but lacking in individuality, and often he brings a large branch of some tree or shrub in winter when there are no leaves, and after getting the name of the tree it belongs to from the children, he gives them five minutes to "take a portrait" of it in any one colour they choose, simply to get the characteristics, or to use Miss Hodgson's word, the "gesture" of it. Most of us have seen Mrs. Perrin's beautiful botanical collection, in which every flower is most artistically painted, instead of being pressed and probably thereby losing all its colour and charm. It would be a delightful way of teaching botany to take the orders in turn, and find and paint all the flowers in each order. Of course to do all the orders would be more than the work of a lifetime, but the better-known ones would make a beautiful collection, and the children would love doing it, and would thereby get a knowledge of the Latin names without any drudgery. But I daresay several of you have done this since seeing Mrs. Perrin's collection.

The illustrations are a much more difficult matter, one feels, and yet Mr. Cooke puts the children "to it," so to speak, at once. The first picture he always gives to the quite tiny children to paint for him at home is, "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall!" A most difficult picture, I'm sure you'll all agree, but given of course to get practice of ovals for the egg, and some of the efforts brought the following week are truly funny, and require a good deal of explanation. One thing the children never forget is to put a little stream of yellow—the yoke running out—for the picture "Humpty Dumpty had a great fall." Humpty may have no arms and only one eye, but the yoke is never forgotten!

Mr. Cooke never laughs at a picture unless it is meant to be funny, and never says:—"That is not the way it ought to be done." He knows we have to *wait* till the children see differently themselves, and is content to do so; he never tells in so many words how to do it. If the trees are up in the air, or the fields standing up on end, he quaintly says:—"Ah! you've been in Fairyland, I see, little woman; I like those Fairy trees of yours growing up in the air," or some remark which shows the child *he* does not see them that way, but comforts her with the feeling he almost wishes he could, and he gains confidence. This may seem to us a slow way, and we may feel he ought to *show* more—he shows nothing and tells nothing. Everything must be drawn out of the child and learnt from his own observation, and he is content to wait till the child can express more and more correctly what he sees.

I quote again from his paper: "Children enjoy drawings of their own from their own imagination, and they often make wonderful and beautiful pictures. Of these I can only say encourage and help them; enter into their methods and thought; help them to correct their errors *by their own* observation. If they put two eyes on one side of a face, it is because they know two eyes exist. . . . Say to them, "Look again at the face; can we see two eyes at one time?" I think we have to be quite Spartan about this giving no help either practical or by telling. It is so tempting just to take the brush and show or to explain how the thing should be done. But Mr. Cooke says: "This is not education, but teaching by authority. The process of learning is of more value than giving the result without seeking and doing."

Thus he would not even tell them what colours to mix to produce the colour they want.

Children who have naturally that power of expressing their thoughts on paper, by painting pictures, get on wonderfully quickly under Mr. Cooke's training. But you may say, "They would anywhere if they have talent." But that brings me to the beauty of the thing—the wonderful way in which those children who have *not* talent and are *not* quick at expressing themselves in this way, slowly but very surely acquire a facility with the brush which is a delight to themselves, and are almost certain to find that they have a gift for for at least *one* of the three sections of the subject—design, Nature work, or illustration. Mr. Cooke's favourite subjects for pictures are the old Greek mythological stories—Persephone gathering daffodils, or Demeter searching for her in Hades, &c., and the children practise studies of drapery in the class, one of the children sometimes dressing in Greek dress. Another excellent place for studying draperies is the First Vase Room in the British Museum, with its beautiful Greek and Etruscan vases.

The examples of work I have brought to show to-day are from two children, one of whom has, I think, decided talent, but has only attended Mr. Cooke's classes for three years. The other is the work of a child who has not *talent*, but has worked steadily and eagerly for six or seven years, and is now very successful in Nature work and design.

Now about *our* work with the children; and if I have to say "I" a good deal, I know you will forgive me, as, of course, I can only speak from personal experience. I feel sure it is no use expecting much result from the children's brushwork, if we only give them half-an-hour or an hour's work at it in the week. When we realise a thing is important, we can always make time for it, and I find it can be brought into so many of the lessons without taking up too much time and attention. History, for instance. I have some charts here to shew you which have been rather successful. I had seen Miss Beale's pattern chart once in the "Parents' Review," and thought the idea so excellent I was determined to follow it up, but to have the charts done with the brush instead of a pen. I feared there might be difficulties because of the fineness of the work. But the children found none,

and were full of ideas, and at the end of the history lesson I gave a quarter of an hour for Chart; and I have found this little picture fixes the event and its date in the children's minds as no other way seems to do, also the thinking out of what *is* the really important event for the year and finding a suitable picture to represent it is a very good training. The child, who is the product of the New Education, has many ideas, and the thing does not flag, also nothing appals her. I remember saying one day I thought it would be good if K did a study of a statue there was in the drawing-room—a large thing of Diana—for practice of Greek drapery and head-dress. I rather feared an outcry of "Oh, how difficult," knowing what *I* should have felt if asked to do such a thing. But the suggestion was very calmly taken, and in an hour's time she had done an excellent study of the thing.

Then as to writing, so much more might be done with the brush. I should like it to be "The brush of a ready writer," not the pen. I instituted a Brushwork Copy-book, setting some little line of poetry, such as "Time glides away like to a stream," and having it copied below in any colour the child chose, with her brush, beginning the line with a beautiful Old English letter. I wish I had the book to shew you, it was really charming.

Then, I think, we should never read aloud to the children without having brush-pictures made while we read. Whether it is Roman-History stories, or German and French ones, they can make some little picture and write *in* Brushwork writing underneath it what it is meant to represent. It does not matter whether they are beautifully done; it is all practice, and we know that, in time, makes perfect.

Brushwork is also a wonderful way of getting to know and understand the children. They will paint things they would never talk about—things from that dream world of theirs into which they are so loth to let the Olympians enter. Miss Mason says: "Imagination is nothing if not creative," and I cannot help thinking that children, especially imaginative ones, lose a great deal if we do not help them to create these pictures and designs, which I am sure are all there in their minds only waiting to be helped out. Let us remember that it has been said that "A poet has died young in the breast of the most stolid," and let us determine the artist shall not meet with the same fate.